

## 4.2 B. Bridgegate

### Character Area Assessment

#### Location

The Bridgegate area is located within the City Walls to the immediate south of the core area around The Cross. It extends south from the intersection with Grosvenor Street, the spine of the area being Lower Bridge Street. The southern extent of the area is marked by the Bridgegate itself and the River Dee beyond. To the east the area extends to the City Walls.

#### Sub-Areas

The Character Area has been broken down into six sub-areas of different discernible character:

- **B1. Lower Bridge Street** -the spine of this Character Area, from the south of the Grosvenor Street frontage to Bridgegate.
- **B2. St Olave's Street** - backland to the rear of the eastern frontage of Lower Bridge Street.
- **B3. Gamul Place** - a small mews of Victorian terraced housing, behind the western frontage of Lower Bridge Street, south of Castle Street.
- **B4. Albion Street** - the area including Volunteer Street and the terraced streets in the east of the area: Albion Street, Albion Place and Steele Street.

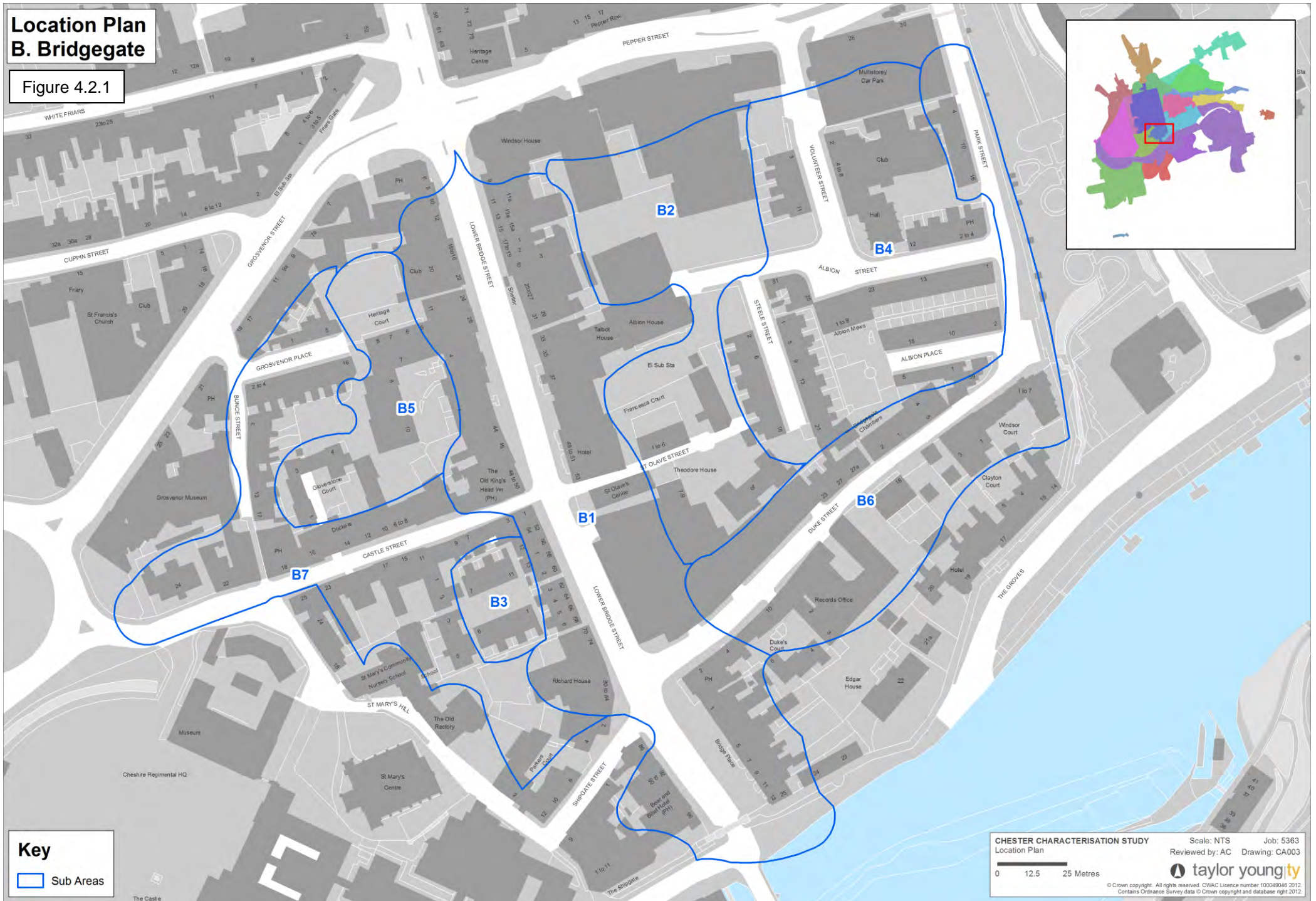
- **B5. Heritage Court** - various backland areas behind the western frontage of Lower Bridge Street, north of Castle Street.
- **B6. Duke Street** – Duke Street and Park Street: the south-eastern fringe of this area.
- **B7. Castle Street** – the western part of this area: Castle Street, Bunce Street, Grosvenor Place and backland areas south of Castle Street.



*Lower Bridge Street*

# Location Plan B. Bridgegate

Figure 4.2.1





## Historical Development

The history of the Bridgegate area dates back to the medieval period. This part of the City lies within the medieval walls of Chester, extended from the earlier Roman walled fortress and Lower Bridge Street represented the principal entry point from North Wales. Several buildings of the seventeenth century and earlier eras remain (such as the 15<sup>th</sup>/16<sup>th</sup> century St Mary's Church and the Bear and Billet public house, which dates from 1664). The Rows once extended down this part of Lower Bridge Street forming a complete linked passage, becoming later enclosed by individual property owners. Remnants of the Rows can still be seen on the street.

During the English Civil War, when Chester was besieged by Parliamentary forces in 1645, King Charles I entered the City via the Old Dee Bridge with 600 men and stayed the night at Sir Francis Gamul's house on Lower Bridge Street (Gamul House today).



*Lower Bridge Street, 1829 (print by Pickering)*

The port at Chester declined seriously from the late 18<sup>th</sup> century as the River Dee silted up and the Bridgegate area, like the rest of Chester, declined with it. In response to this a new port was created outside the

north-west corner of the City Walls (in the current 'Old Port' area – see section K), replacing the earlier port outside the Bridgegate. This was the result of efforts by the newly created River Dee Company, who also canalised sections of the River in 1733, in an attempt to maintain the maritime presence of Chester in response to the rise of Liverpool. Nevertheless Chester could not handle large vessels and lost maritime trade to Liverpool and Ellesmere Port.

Despite these difficulties in the later Georgian era, Chester became again a centre of affluence. This trend continued into the Industrial Revolution. The Bridgegate itself dates from 1781-2 (by Joseph Turner), replacing an earlier structure at this point. Lower Bridge Street was at this time lined almost continuously with tall 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century buildings, being a popular location for the gentry to build houses. Today many Georgian townhouses survive and this era provides the dominant character of this area.

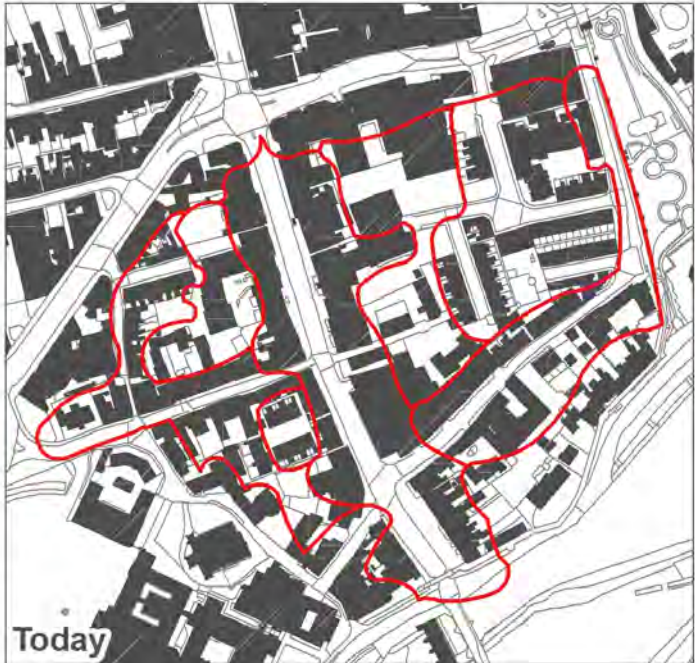
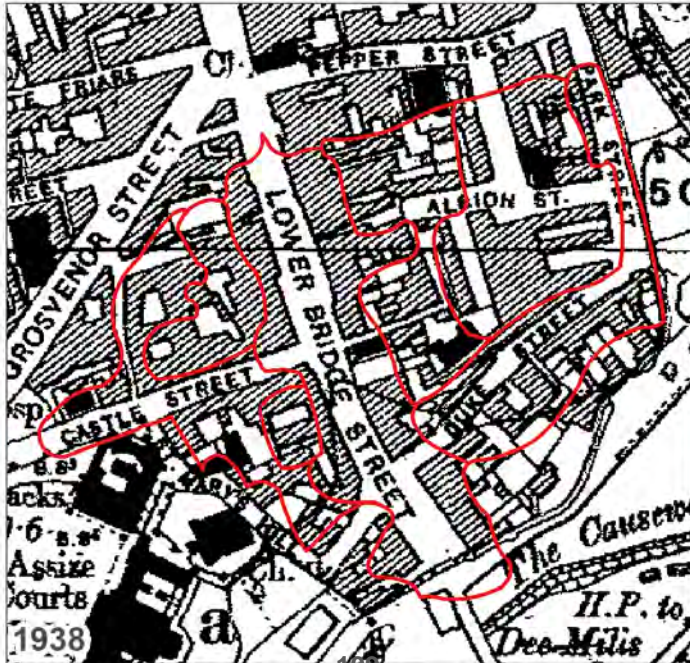
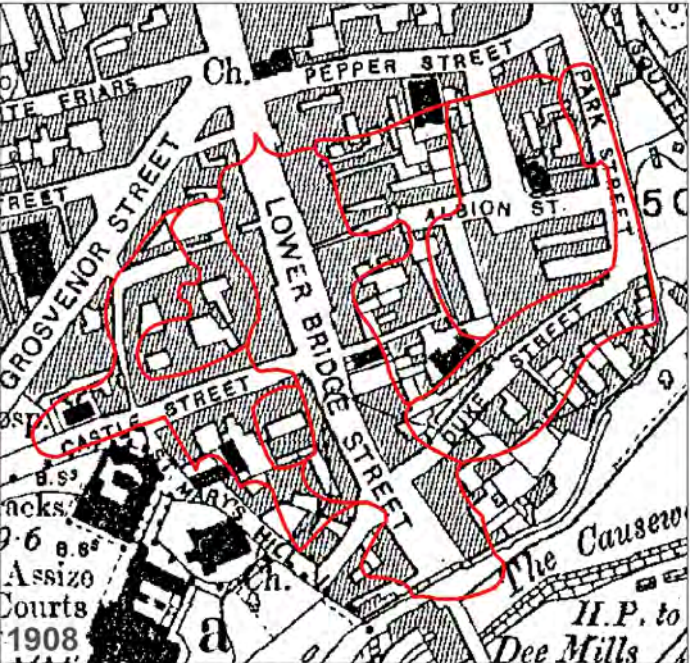
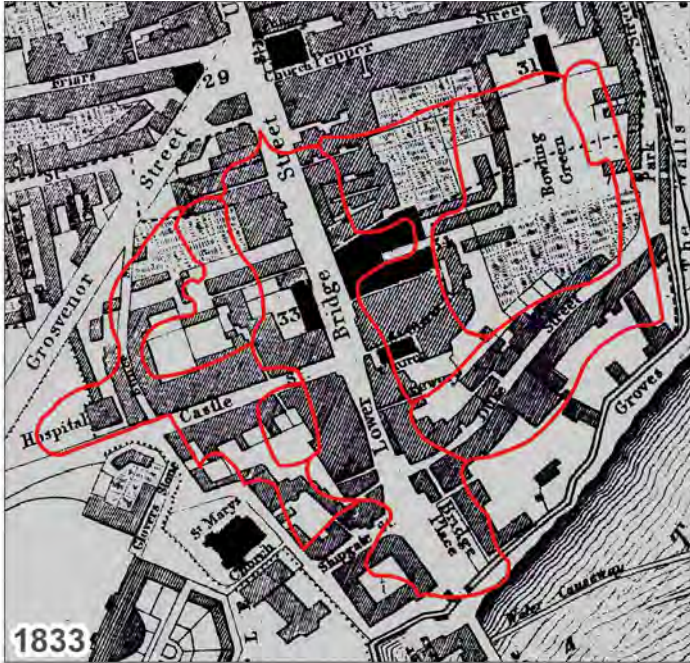
Historic mapping (see Figure 4.2.2) reveals that this area has been continually developed since at least 1581, with much of today's street structure in place. On Braun's Plan of 1581 (Lower) Bridge Street follows the same alignment as today but some other streets follow slightly different alignments (though this may be due to inaccurate mapping). The later Hamilton Park (in the block between Lower Bridge Street and Pepper Street) does not exist at this point, with this area being fully occupied by building plots.

The River Dee represented a natural break to the expansion of Chester until the latter half of the nineteenth century. The significant changes within the urban form in this area were the disappearance of Hamilton Park, which was replaced by the terraces of the Albion Street area. The Volunteer Drill Hall on Albion Street was built in 1869 for the 6<sup>th</sup> Cheshire Rifle Corps. The area where the Drill Hall was built was originally the former gardens of the Albion Hotel. Several streets of terraced, working class houses, Albion Place, Albion Street, and Volunteer Street, were laid



# Historical Development B. Bridgegate

Figure 4.2.2





out in the mid 1860s around the Drill Hall and Steele Street was built in the 1880s. Public subscription paid for the Drill Hall, which cost £2,500. It was built in a castellated style, using red sandstone, stone-dressed brick and a slate roof, though now the facade is largely painted white. In the early 20th century, the building was extended through to Duke Street and almshouses and two courts were demolished. Only the front elevation survived redevelopment into residential apartments in 2000. The Drill Hall was a Recruiting Centre during the Great War.

The other major intervention was the construction of Grosvenor Street in 1830, cutting diagonally across the street grid, and to a certain extent serving to delineate and define this area to its south-east. Other than these changes the street form has remained remarkably consistent, with buildings replacing earlier structures on the same plots on a largely ad-hoc basis. Often buildings have been re-built in part and contain elements of all eras from the medieval period to the present day. Although facades generally appear Georgian or Victorian the buildings often have Jacobean, Tudor or Medieval elements (especially the undercrofts).



Left: 17<sup>th</sup> century building on Lower Bridge Street (1900)  
Right: 26 Lower Bridge Street (1900)

In the 1968 Conservation in Chester report the Bridgegate area was highlighted as “one of the worst examples of area decline”. Happily, after significant conservation and sensitive re-construction work in the last forty years the situation today is much improved and the area contributes a strong historic character to the City. This was acknowledged in 1983 with the award of a EUROPA NOSTRA medal.

### Land-uses

Lower Bridge Street is at the southern edge of the retail core and has a secondary retail function, with offices and institutional uses completing the mix. Off this main street residential predominates through the area. There are also offices in the refurbished courtyards of the Heritage Court area and the County & Diocesan Records Office on Duke Street.

Being on the southern periphery footfall is noticeably less than in the retail core but Lower Bridge Street is still fairly busy. Surrounding streets have a quieter, residential nature.

### Urban Form

The morphology of this area follows the medieval street pattern to a high degree. As such, it links well to surrounding areas. It lies in an important position in the central core and is well defined by Grosvenor Street/Pepper Street to the north and the City Walls and the River to the south and east, although this Character Area is somewhat contracted from these edges, which have their own character. Instead, Lower Bridge Street forms the core that serves to define this area.

Streets are organic in form: generally straight, with a slight bends and variations, largely in response to the topography. The grain of the area generally comprises long terraces fronting the back-of-pavement. These long frontages are often broken by pedestrian alleys, and a series of courtyards and mews developments to the rear. Terraces can either be

highly consistent (such as the terraces in the Albion Street area) or can offer an interesting but complimentary variety (i.e. on Lower Bridge Street). There are a few larger footprint modern buildings that appear out of scale in this context: the office block on Lower Bridge Street/Duke Street, the office buildings extending south from Pepper Street and the multi-storey car park on Pepper Street.

Topography plays an important role in the area, with Lower Bridge Street falling in height as it passes southwards, representing the journey from the higher ground of the City's heart to the River. This means that longer views are gradually opened up in series, the last of which is the pleasing environment outside the Bridgegate, lined with fine listed buildings (including the Bear and Billet) and terminated by the Bridgegate itself. The topography also makes views northward longer and more prominent, especially the long vista up Bridge Street to The Cross and the view of St Michael's Church at the junction with Pepper Street. Wider views are also opened up of the wider landscape beyond the Walls.



*Southern end of Lower Bridge Street*

Lower Bridge Street simply represents the southern leg of Bridge Street on its journey to the Bridgegate. This is a fairly wide street, meaning that even with the taller three and four storey townhouses that line both sides it maintains a relatively open feel, opening up longer views. Street frontages are continuous on both sides here and of a consistently high quality, with only a few exceptions. Interestingly, the Rows once extended along Lower Bridge Street before property owners built over them. Remnants of this form are still visible in a few buildings (most clearly at no. 11 and at Gamul House, where a stepped platform at the frontage provides an interesting clue as to the possible origin of the Rows).

Elsewhere, Castle Street, Duke Street and Shipgate Street all follow a similar form of organic streets and back-of-pavement continuous terraces of considerable variety. These streets are narrower than Lower Bridge Street but building heights remain at generally three storeys, resulting a much greater sense of enclosure.



*Castle Street*

The terraced streets in sub-area B4 (Albion Street, Volunteer Street, Albion Place and Steele Street) have a different form. This area was re-developed in the late nineteenth century and consequently a planned

**Urban Form**  
**B. Bridgegate**

Figure 4.2.3



**Key**

 Sub Areas



The third form prevalent is the backland areas that extend behind the principal medieval streets (i.e. sub-areas B2, B3 and B5). These are in a wide mix of forms and uses. Some are private yards and car parks, some are courtyard and mews fronted by either new development or refurbished older buildings. Sometimes these are attractive spaces fronted by buildings, often they are untidy and unattractive. Of most interest is Gamul Place (a courtyard fronted by two short Victorian terraces); and the office courtyard to the rear of 28-42 Lower Bridge Street, which is a good re-creation of a Georgian courtyard although all of the surrounding development is new build. These spaces are all accessed via narrow lanes from the principal streets or, if private, through locked gates or buildings. Some of these spaces are linked to each other, often they are not. Being rather hidden and inaccessible they do not contribute strongly to the wider character area but can sometimes represent greater interest and a richness of experience. Gamul Place, for instance, is something of a hidden gem.



*Gamul Place*

## Townscape Character

Buildings in the Character Area are predominantly Georgian and Victorian. The mix is generally fine-grain with buildings of different age sitting alongside one another. The dominant character of Lower Bridge Street is Georgian whilst on Duke Street and the Albion Street area it is Victorian. A small number of Edwardian, Inter-war and modern buildings are interspersed throughout the area. There are also a number of earlier buildings on Lower Bridge Street, such as the medieval Old Kings Head, 17th century Bear and Billet and the, originally medieval, Gamul House. Many buildings have been altered several times over the centuries and many are medieval in part.



*Lower Bridge Street*

The style of building throughout the Lower Bridge Street area is generally that of separately designed and distinct buildings that collectively form an adjoining terrace. Within this terrace there may be medieval or black-and-white revival gable-fronted buildings alongside Georgian and Victorian townhouses, together forming a rich and interesting mix. On Castle Street the form is more consistently Georgian townhouses, until it opens up at its western end. In Duke Street the mix is widened with



Victorian industrial architecture and contemporary infill. As described previously, the Albion Terraces area is strongly defined with highly consistent Victorian domestic terraces. On Grosvenor Place a strong and consistent Georgian three-storey terrace, matching a similar terrace on Grosvenor Street, provides a distinct and different form.

For the Georgian buildings materials include both red/brown brick and white or cream-coloured stucco. The brick buildings generally have cream coloured quoins. Sash windows are prevalent throughout, in typical Georgian form and are decorated with lintels. Doors have moulded frames, pediments and porticos. Rooflines are both hidden shallow pitches behind a parapet and gable fronted pitched roofs. On Castle Street in particular the narrowness of the street prevents a complete view of the roofline.



*Albion Street*

The Victorian buildings on Lower Bridge Street are generally in the medieval-revival style with black-painted timber facing and white render, and a gable-fronted roof. Shop-fronts on Lower Bridge Street are generally well proportioned and maintained and follow their original form.

The Victorian terraces in the Albion Street area are two storey red/brown brick with traditional pitched slate roofs. They have simple door openings with fanlights, sash windows with a gently rounded brick lintel, and decorative brickwork in bands.

### Landscape Character

There is very little open space in the Character Area. There is no public open space and buildings front the back-of-pavement with very few exceptions, providing no gardens on the street. The major roads through the area are often dominated by highways infrastructure and heavy traffic, creating a poor street environment. This is true at the crossroads of Lower Bridge Street/Grosvenor Street/ Pepper Street. There are some mature street trees at the southern end of Lower Bridge Street where buildings are set further back, which provide a positive street environment. There are also street trees at Gamul Place and alongside the City Walls on Park Street. There is some more recent tree-planting in some of the backland courtyards. The public realm is moderate in quality. Paving is simple but well maintained, pavements are generally narrow, street furniture is heritage in style. This is a very urban environment but it does not feel oppressive, largely due to the variety in building form and



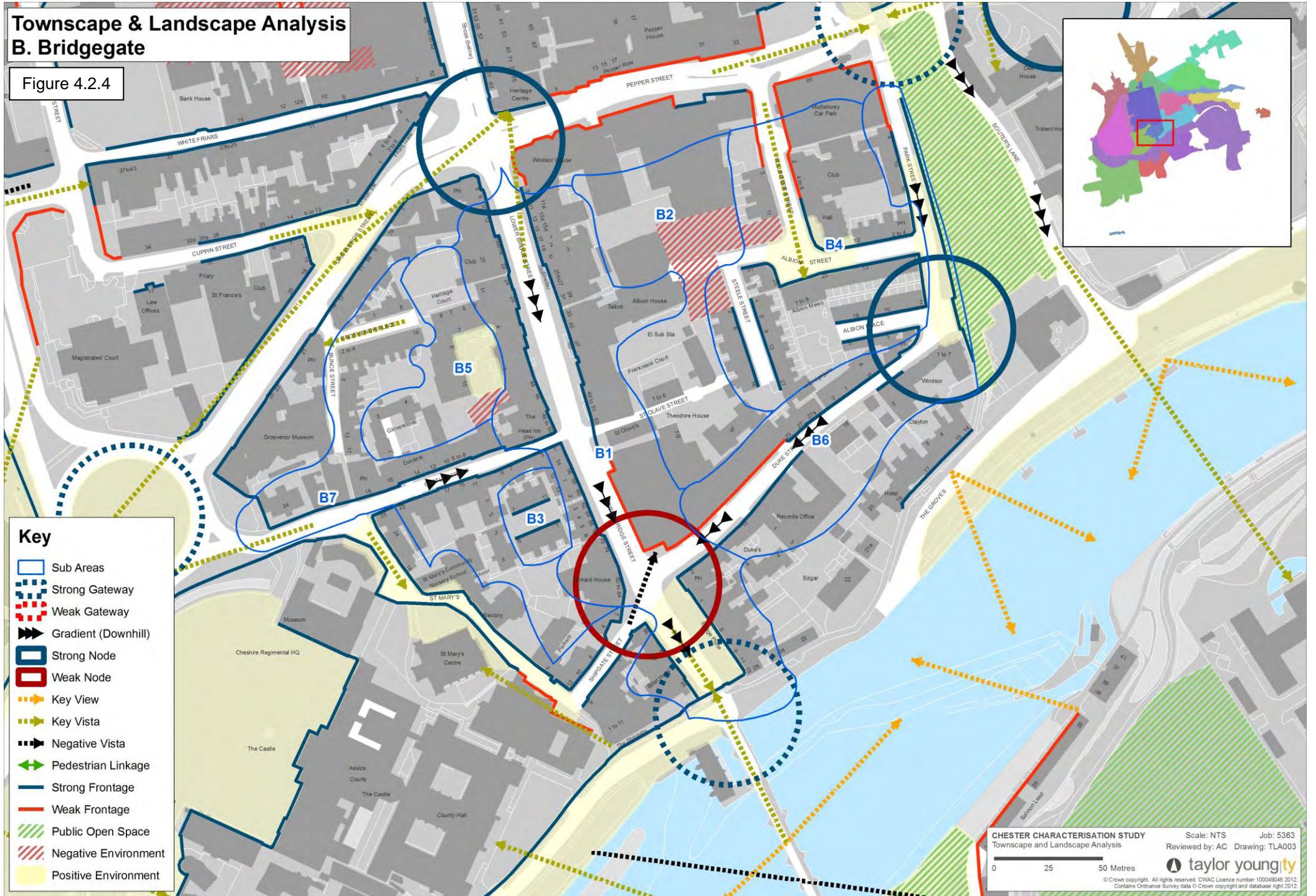
the topography. The Bridgegate Place area (see picture below) is wider and has the benefit of street trees, giving a somewhat different character to the rest of Lower Bridge Street.

*Left: Street trees at Bridge Place*



# Townscape & Landscape Analysis B. Bridgegate

Figure 4.2.4



**Key**

- Sub Areas
- Strong Gateway
- Weak Gateway
- Gradient (Downhill)
- Strong Node
- Weak Node
- Key View
- Key Vista
- Negative Vista
- Pedestrian Linkage
- Strong Frontage
- Weak Frontage
- Public Open Space
- Negative Environment
- Positive Environment



B. Bridgegate: Typical Materials and Details



## Designated Heritage Assets

All of this area is within the City Centre Conservation Area. There are a large number of listed buildings in the area. The majority of Lower Bridge Street is Grade II listed, with the exception of 24-42 which has been rebuilt and some 1960s office blocks. Key listed buildings include the following:

- The **City Walls** (Grade I, also a Scheduled Monument).
- The **Bridgewater**, Lower Bridge Street (Grade I, also a Scheduled Monument) – built 1781-2.



- The **Bear and Billet public house**, Lower Bridge Street (Grade I) – dating from 1664, medieval in style.



- **Gamul House**, Lower Bridge Street (Grade II\*) – timber-framed Medieval/Jacobean house.
- The **Old King's Head PH**, Lower Bridge Street (Grade II\*) – dates from 17<sup>th</sup> century.
- **Shipgate House**, Shipgate Street (Grade II\*) – early 18<sup>th</sup> century townhouse.
- The **Oldfellows Hall** (Grade II\*) – 18<sup>th</sup> century townhouse.



- The **Nine Houses**, Park Street (Grade II) – dating from 17<sup>th</sup> century. (NB. Only six houses now remain).





## Buildings and Structures of Townscape Merit

Sixteen un-listed Buildings of Townscape Merit have been identified in the Bridgegate area.

- **B1a. 12 Lower Bridge Street** – Victorian townhouse with shop unit, restored.
- **B1b. 1895 rebuild** – black-and-white revival townhouse, in need of refurbishment.
- **B1c. Lower Bridge Street** – large block of Georgian-style townhouses, re-built recently in close replica of earlier buildings here, they still convey strong townscape and reveal earlier form.



- **B3a.12-13 Gamul Place** – the rear of adjacent listed buildings on Lower Bridge Street fronting this space.

- **B4a. Welsh Congregational Chapel** – neo-gothic Victorian chapel



- **B4b. Albion terrace (northside)** – well detailed and consistent Victorian terrace. Article 4 Directions apply.

- **B4c. Albion Inn** – corner public house consistent with B4b. Article 4 Directions apply. Built in the 1880s, close to the Drill Hall volunteer recruiting centre it was popular in the First World War with the young men about to leave for France and



Flanders. The pub displays Great War artefacts and veterans used to visit it, especially on commemorative occasions.

- **B4d. Albion terrace (southside)** – similar to B4b. Article 4 Directions apply.

- **B4e. Albion Street corner.** Interesting rounded corner detail. Article 4 Directions apply.



- **B4f. Albion Place terrace.** Distinct from Albion Street, also very consistent. Article 4 Directions apply.



- **B6a. Former Duke Street school.** Article 4 Directions apply. Former Edwardian school buildings.

- **B6b. Duke Street schoolhouse.** Edwardian, part of group with B6a. Article 4 Directions apply.



- **B6c. Chester County & Diocesan Record Office.** Former Victorian warehouse. Simple industrial architecture.





- **B7a. Edwardian terrace.** Article 4 Directions apply. Plain but consistent and unusual form in Chester.



- **B7b. Early Victorian terrace.** Article 4 Directions apply. Well detailed and consistent (in neo-Georgian style), matches D4b on Grosvenor Street.



- **B7c. 12-14 Castle Street.** Georgian-style townhouses in good condition.

### Key Detractors

Three key detractors have been identified in the area.



The 1960s former car showroom on the corner of Lower Bridge Street/Duke Street (left) is out-of-scale, in a prominent corner position and occupies a significant length of frontage on Lower Bridge Street. Its

frontage lacks the variety and interest of the rest of the street (although it is proportioned vertically to match the streetscape) and the building is in generally poor condition.

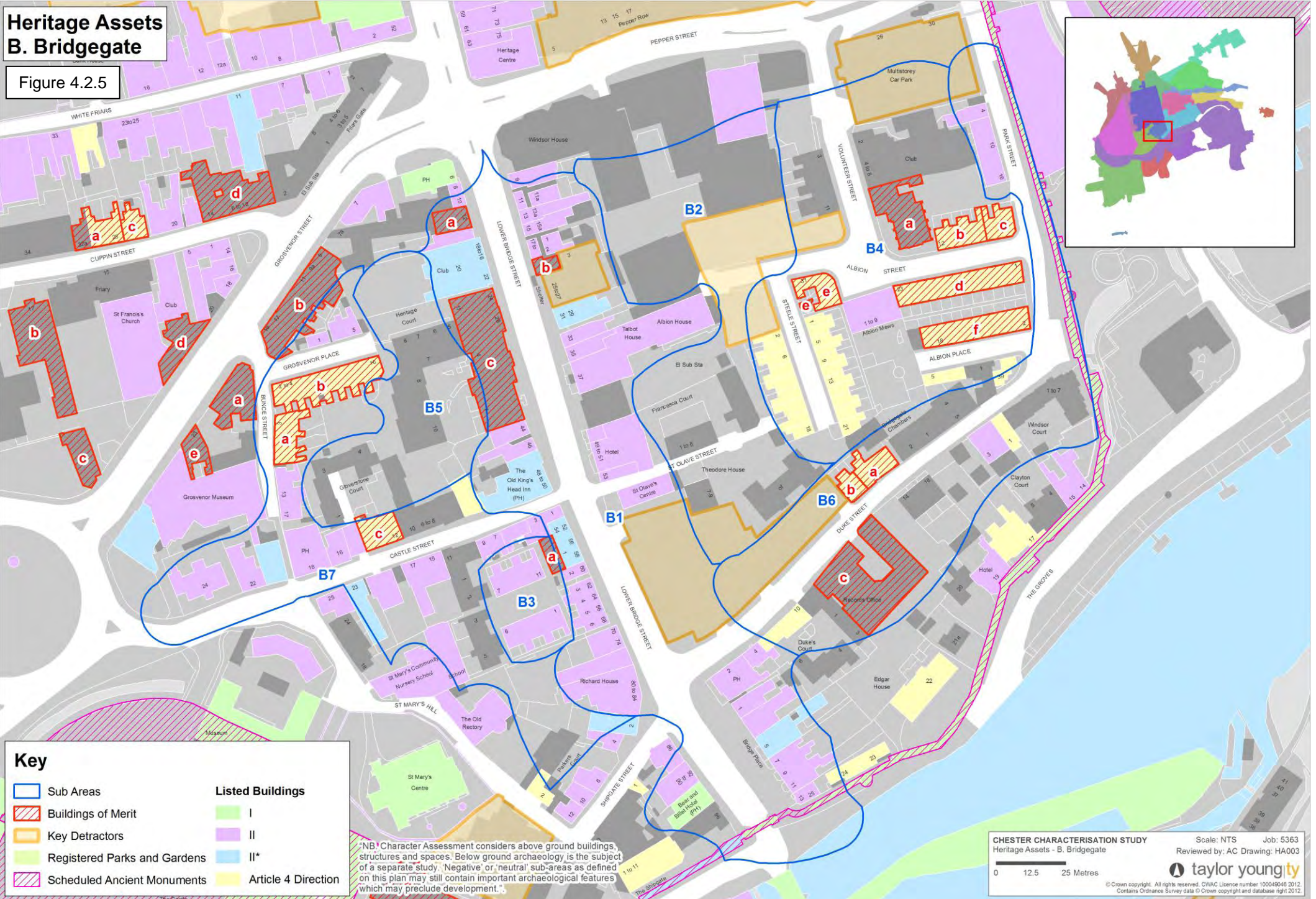


The aluminium clad building at 25-27 Lower Bridge Street (left) has a low grade appearance that is out of context with the surrounding townscape and appears as an eyesore (despite attempts to break up its elevational form).



# Heritage Assets B. Bridgegate

Figure 4.2.5



"NB: Character Assessment considers above ground buildings, structures and spaces. Below ground archaeology is the subject of a separate study. 'Negative' or 'neutral' sub-areas as defined on this plan may still contain important archaeological features which may preclude development."



There are also a series of formal and informal car parks occupying vacant land where buildings once stood on Albion Street/Steele Street. The car parks on the northern side are of particularly poor appearance. Together they serve as a break to the consistent building form of this sub-area and isolate Steele Street from the rest of this area.

### Summary: Character Assessment

In summary this area plays an important role in the character of the City of Chester. It is generally positive in character, with its historic built form forming an easily recognisable and strong character today. The two best examples are the principally Georgian Lower Bridge Street and the Victorian Albion Street area where the historic built form exists in the most complete and well-maintained form. The condition and function of some of the backlands creates some areas of negative character but this does little to compromise the character of the area as a whole.

Character Assessment is shown on Figure 4.1.6 and explained below.

- **B1. Lower Bridge Street : Critical** – a key historic City Centre street with many fine Georgian buildings in good condition.
- **B2. St Olave’s Street : Negative** – a series of backland areas in generally poor condition.
- **B3. Gamul Place : Positive** – a small but good example of a Victorian domestic residential courtyard, unusual in Chester.
- **B4. Albion Street : Critical** – a strong example of planned late Victorian neighbourhood.
- **B5. Heritage Court : Neutral** – a series of contemporary Georgian pastiche developments and private yards and car parks.

- **B6. Duke Street : Positive** – a steeply sloping Victorian street with a mixed industrial and residential character.
- **B7. Castle Street: Positive** – a strong Georgian street with many fine buildings.

### Character Statement

*“The Bridgegate area exhibits a strong character resulting from its surviving medieval street pattern; the variety of townhouses on Lower Bridge Street of various eras; its topography ( falling from Bridge Street to the River); and the remarkably consistent planned Victorian neighbourhood in the Albion Street area.”*

### Management and Policy Recommendations

Conservation policy appears to be generally working well in the area. A significant effort in the 1970s and 1980s has resulted in the major enhancement of Lower Bridge Street (which is still well maintained today, and of the Nine Houses on Park Street. The Article 4 directions applied to the Albion Street area have been well observed resulting in highly consistent terraces with many original features. The whole area is already within a Conservation Area and there are a large number of listed buildings (including several Grade II\* and Grade I).

Future conservation effort should be directed to the enhancement of backland areas in terms of public realm and the rear elevations of buildings, providing through pedestrian access where appropriate or well defined boundaries to private spaces. St. Olave’s Street and St. Olave’s Church should be a particular focus.

Shop-fronts on Lower Bridge Street are generally in good form and condition but shop-front guidance would help to ensure that this strong character does not become eroded.

### Capacity to Accommodate Change

In this fine-grain area of consistent historic value there are few opportunities for redevelopment. There is potential for infill development in place of a few modern buildings on Lower Bridge Street and Castle Street if these sites become available. Larger scale opportunities may be provided by the two key detractors described above or in some of the backland areas.

### Design Principles for New Development

In infill sites new development will need to follow the proportions, materials, colours and styles of surrounding development closely, without necessarily being pastiche. The prevailing building line and building heights should be followed and the architecture should be muted and not detract from the surrounding listed buildings.

In backland areas there may be potential for new courtyard development accessed from the principal streets. This should be similar in approach to the recent developments on the Heritage Court area. The rear elevations of surrounding historic buildings should be placed in a sympathetic setting.

If the Lower Bridge Street/Duke Street former car showroom site is redeveloped then there is some opportunity for more contemporary architecture of distinct style. This must respect the corner of these two streets, follow a back-of-pavement building line and provide a vertical proportion and subdivision of elevations to provide a richness of interest to match the rest of Lower Bridge Street. The falling topography offers an opportunity for greater height providing that this does not detract from surrounding listed buildings.

The Albion Street/Steele Street detractor site offers the opportunity to complete the outer corner of these streets with new development. This development should follow a back-of-pavement building line and not

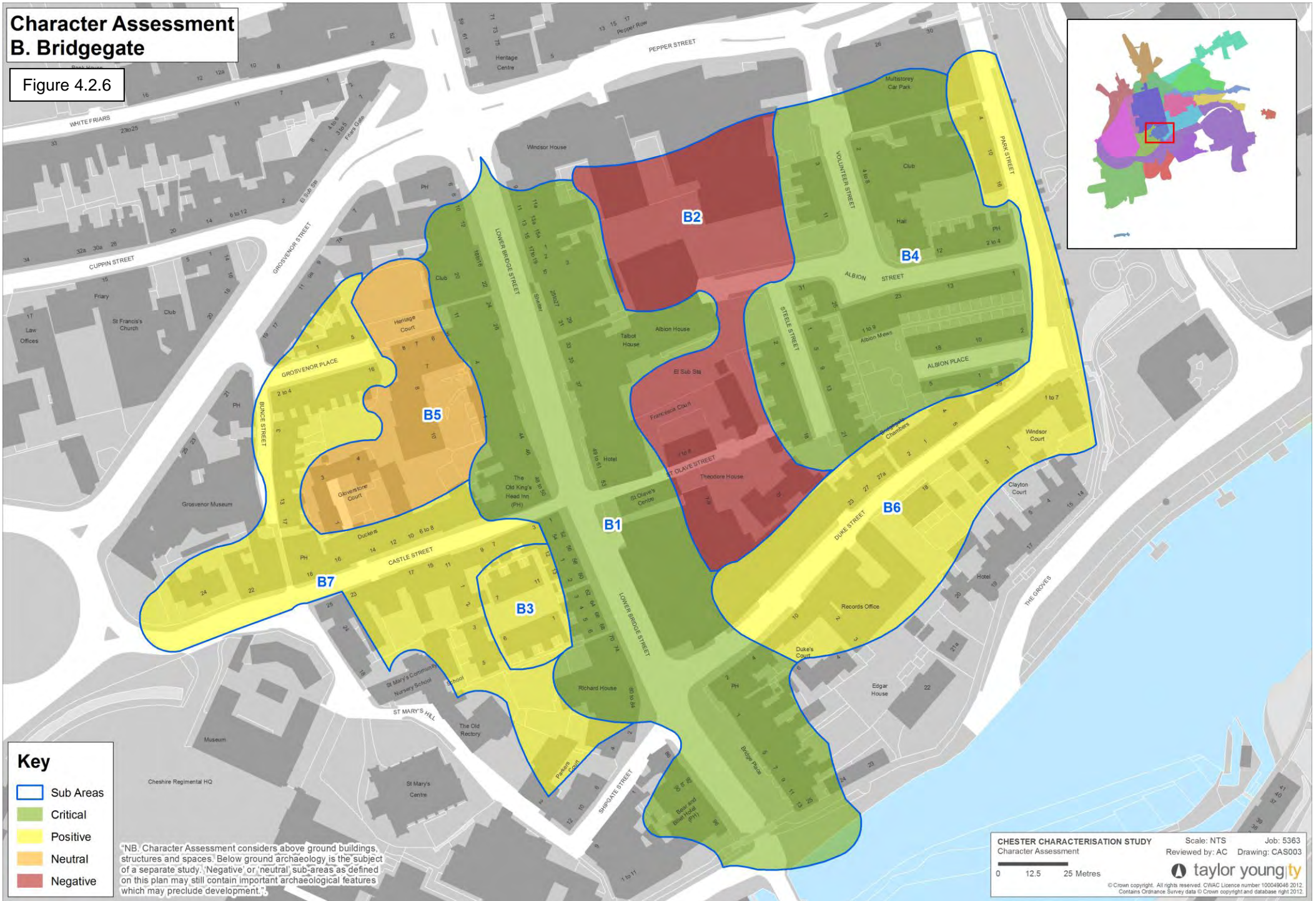
detract from the simple palette of materials and colours in the area. Height should respect their modest form. The corner of Volunteer Street/Albion Street should be marked with a feature to complement the curved form of the residential block opposite.





# Character Assessment B. Bridgegate

Figure 4.2.6



**Key**

- Sub Areas
- Critical
- Positive
- Neutral
- Negative

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**CHESTER CHARACTERISATION STUDY**  
Character Assessment

Scale: NTS Job: 5363  
Reviewed by: AC Drawing: CAS003

0 12.5 25 Metres

**taylor young**ty

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